

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia: Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 137 is a bipartisan effort by the Judiciary Committee, led by the gentleman from California (Mr. *Gallegly*) as the chief sponsor and the gentleman from Oregon (Mr.

Blumenauer

) as the lead Democratic sponsor. Both have worked long and hard on this issue. I would also like to express my appreciation to

Chairman

Conyers

, Ranking Member

Smith

, and Subcommittee Ranking Member

Forbes

for their leadership and support in moving this matter forward, and also the former chairman of the committee, Mr.

Coble

, who is with us today.

The Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act of 2007 addresses the growing problem of staged animal fighting in this country. It increases the penalties under the current Federal law for transporting animals in interstate commerce for the purpose of fighting and for interstate and foreign commerce in knives and gaffs designed for use in cockfighting.

Specifically, H.R. 137 makes violations of the law a felony punishable by up to 3 years in prison. Currently, these offenses are

limited to misdemeanor treatment with the possibility of a fine and up to 1 year of imprisonment. Most States make all staged animal fighting illegal. Just one State currently allows cockfighting to occur legally.

The transport of game birds for the purpose of animal fighting and the implements of cockfighting are already prohibited by Federal law, though the current law only allows, as I have indicated, the misdemeanor treatment. In 1976 Congress amended title 7, U.S. Code, section 2156, the Animal Welfare Act, to make it illegal to knowingly sell, buy, transport, deliver, or receive a dog or other animal in interstate or foreign commerce for the purposes of participation in an animal fighting venture or knowingly sponsoring or exhibiting an animal in a fighting venture if any animal in the venture was moved in interstate or foreign commerce. Amendments to the Animal Welfare Act contained a loophole, however, that allowed shipments of birds across State lines for fighting purposes if the destination State allowed cockfighting.

While Congress did amend section 26 of the Animal Welfare Act to close this loophole in 2002, the penalty section and other provisions of the act have not been updated since their original enactment in 1976. This bill is designed to address those shortfalls to more effectively cover modern problems associated with animal fighting ventures.

As I have already mentioned, the legislation increases current penalties to provide a meaningful deterrent. One of the primary reasons for enacting the increased penalties under title 18 is the reluctance of U.S. Attorneys to pursue animal fighting cases under the current misdemeanor provisions because they view the penalties as ineffective against an animal fighting industry, which

has continued unabated nationwide.

H.R. 137 further makes it a felony to transport cockfighting implements in interstate or foreign commerce. These implements take the form of razor-sharp knives, known as slashers; or gaffs, instruments shaped in the form of curved ice picks that are attached to birds' legs for fighting. Proponents of these implements within the game fowl community apparently contend that they inflict cleaner wounds upon the birds which are then quicker and easier to heal.

Since penalties against animal fighting were codified in 1976, Federal authorities have pursued less than half a dozen animal fighting cases, despite the fact that the USDA has received numerous tips from informants and requests to assist with State and local prosecutions.

In addition, despite the fact that all 50 States have banned dog fighting and all but one State has banned cockfighting, the animal fighting industry continues to thrive within the United States. Numerous nationally circulated animal fighting magazines advertise fighting animals, and paid lobbyists continue to advocate for animal fighters' interests. Thankfully, H.R. 137 will seek to bring an end to these practices.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, this bill affects matters within the jurisdiction of the Committee on Agriculture and the Judiciary Committee. Both committees have worked closely together to ensure that all matters are dealt with appropriately. We appreciate their assistance in bringing this bill expeditiously to the floor, and I will insert into the *Congressional Record* at this point an exchange of letters between Chairman

Peterson
of the Agriculture Committee and Chairman
Conyers
of Judiciary.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the legislation.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.